

## **CHURCH LEADERS AND POLITICAL LETHARGY IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

An appraisal of the feeble and corrupt political system in Nigeria that paralyses national identity and development, vandalises political ideologies, cripples economic, education and social transformation systems, breeds banditry, unemployment, violence and escalated hardships is a major discourse in this studies. The paper examined the phenomenon of Church leaders' political lethargy in Nigeria, investigating the complexity of their non-participation in the country's political development. By exploring the intersection of religion, politics, and governance, the paper reveals the far-reaching implications of Church leaders' silence on issues of social justice, human rights, and accountability. The failure of the Nigerian government to provide good governance is traced to corrupt and callous political leaders in power who dominate and rule the country with selfish and money mongering spirit of amassing wealth that lop side the system. Findings reveal that large numbers of Church leaders who are spiritually inclined with commendable leadership qualities display their non-challant attitude towards politics on account of the appellation allotted to it as a "dirty game". The number of Church leaders in the Nigerian politics is drastically low. The paper used qualitative research method with content analysis technique. Significantly, it provides insights into critical role of faith-based leaders in shaping Nigeria's future, promoting sustainable development and proposes recommendations for participation of Church leaders in the political development of Nigeria purposely to ensure transformation, good leadership qualities and political initiatives for societal development.

**Keywords:** Church leaders, Participation, Nigeria politics.

### **Introduction**

The nexus between government and religion has been a topic of fascination and discourse in scholarship. Historically, governments have often legitimized their power through divine authority. Viewing it from the biblical foundation, the bible offers a framework for grasping human government and leadership. The concept of human government as ordained by God is keenly rooted in biblical history. Psalm 22:28, describes God as the true Sovereign, and kingship belongs to Him. Roman 13:1-4 emphasises that all human government is instituted by God and rulers are God's servants for the good of humanity. In the Old Testament, God establishes covenants with His people, providing guidelines for governance and leadership (Genesis 9:1-17; Exodus 18:13-27). The concept of sacred authority is rooted in the biblical notion of God's Sovereignty over all creation (Psalm 24: Isaiah 9:6-7). Human government is a divine ordinance, and the powers of coercion, a commendation which it exercises have been

entrusted to it by God for the repression of crime, encouragement of righteousness, reflection of changes, promotion of stewardship and transformational agenda. All powers are ordained by God for well-defined purposes. Thus, God ordained the institution of government. Theocracy implies rule by God, Johnson (2010), submits that human government is ordained by God to maintain justice, peace and order in society. Leeman (2019), opines that the bible teaches that human government has a necessary role in maintaining justice and order in society, but its authority is limited and should be exercised in a way that respects the sovereign of God.

It is vividly known in the historical studies that the branch of Christianity that best captures the Church and State in Paradox position is the Lutheran tradition. This position is at times alluded to as the “dualist approach” to church and state, or the “two kingdoms doctrine. It lays out the kingdom of creation (societal order for all people) and the kingdom of redemption (a gospel order given for the people of God). The kingdom of creation includes political organisation and this should be directed by “universal principles and laws” discernible by way of reason. Secular authorities are responsible for “keeping order and justice in society,” and the church is responsible for spreading and living the gospel. God ultimately institutes government, and it exists because it is necessary to restrain evil in a fallen world.

Politics is variously defined as the ideas and activities involved in getting power in a country or over a particular area of the world. It is also a belief and attitude about how government should work. It can also be seen as the science and act of government, political activities beliefs or affairs, factional scheming for power. (Ceddes & Crosset 2011). Anifowose (2005) observes that, politics has been observed in human group interactions, including corporate, academic and religious institutions. It consists of social relations involving authority and power and refers to the regulation of a political unit and to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply police.

Meanwhile, rulers are God’s ministers, avengers against those that do evil. But a state can only be ruled by instilling fear in those who are ruled and the fear of punishment can never produce true righteousness or justice. By the affairs of the laws and the punishment attached to them, men can be kept from performing the certain injurious action. However, they cannot be made good or attain righteousness of God by those means. Considering the inter-relationship, the Church and state relationship is well summed up by St. Augustine of Hippo: But ruling a province is distinct from a Church. The former must be governed by instilling fear; the latter is to be made lovable by the use of mildness. It is mostly assumed that the country will be able to inculcate true virtue and wisdom in its citizens and produce good governance with a right political agenda.

This reflection is a true awareness of the nature of politics that the justice and peace secured by the state are faulty and unstable. They are obvious complexities ambiguities, inequalities and harshness coherent in the political process. Without mincing words, politics deals with governance and this God-given mandate should not be left in the hand of the people with money- mongering spirit whose belly is their god with eyes full of covetousness and carnality. Everyone with credibility, proven integrity, agility, intellectualism, cognitive dexterity, visionary power, compassionate spirit is undoubtedly qualified for political participation, leadership and responsibility in Nigeria. Church leaders who are theologically groomed and branded can exhibit their political ideologies in the political system and leadership to foster political development and stability in the country. Church leaders are for transformation and illumination and politics should not be looked at with askance. Politics is

for people and run by the people for the betterment of a society. Here the participation of Church leaders in politics to contribute to nation's building, good and stable governance, socio-political and sustainable development is sine-qua-non.

### **The Church as Catalyst for Societal Renewal**

Deciphering the concept of the Church as a spiritual entity, her values and goals aids analyse the reason for Church leaders' spiritual roles and need for their participation and motivation drive in politics. The Church, (*Ecclesia*), is deciphered to be an organism that consists of those in whom Christ is actively alive, as members (body of Christ), with Christ as the Head. Scripturally, the Church is designated as the body of Christ, the pillar of truth, Temple of God, Communion of saints, and many others. The word Church means a local assembly or group of believers in a particular place or a body of individual, living believers who profess faith in and allegiance to Christ. It is also the universal group of believers in all ages including the dead and the living (Mt 16 18, 5:23-27). Preeminently, the Church describes the totality of those who subscribe to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The church therefore, is an assembly of saints and true believers arising from the acceptance and faith in the preaching of the gospel of salvation in Christ and the consequent administration of His sacraments: especially, water baptism and the Lord's Supper. The church is an organism that consists of those in whom Christ is actively alive, as members (body of Christ), with Christ as the Head. Scripturally, the church is designated as the body of Christ, the pillar of truth, the temple of God, the communion of saints, and many others. Churches can be understood as institutions that shape their members' behavior. Specifically, different types of churches provide their members with varying behavioral incentives for participation in religious activity, which in turn have systematic implications for participation in political activity.

### **Church Leaders' Roles**

Interestingly, the Church that was instituted by Christ was not left alone without capable visionary, administrative and shepherding leaders endued with dunamis, diverse gifts, dexterity and skills, called, ordained and commissioned to govern His flocks. Aside preaching and nurturing the flocks with spiritual meals, Church leaders are saddled with a broad spectrum of responsibilities of directing, governing, administering and advising. Their roles extend beyond the Church to the society because they are regarded as God's emissary on earth. In order words, they have a stake in the lives of the people. Church leaders are viewed as goal-oriented, task-oriented and people-oriented. So far there is a fundamental intersection of religion and politics in Nigeria, the role of Church leaders in promoting democracy and good governance in Nigeria cannot be ignored or compromised.

Kuka, (2013) argues that Church leaders have a moral obligation to hold politician accountable for their actions and promote transparency and accountability in government. In the same vein, Omotoye who explored the role of Church leaders in promoting democracy and good governance in Nigeria opines that Church leaders have a crucial role to play in promoting democratic values and principles. He says further that Church leaders have a unique platform to influence public opinion and to hold politicians accountable for their actions. The governmental structure of the Church is such that demands cognitive ability, sagacity and prudence which the Church leaders possess to uphold this spiritual institution. Church leadership is all-encompassing. In order words, Church leadership duties encompass an

extensive array of tasks that guarantee the seamless operation and vigour of the faith community. These responsibilities might involve supervising worship services, administering sacraments, offering pastoral counseling, leading bible studies, coordinating community outreach programs, overseeing finances and making crucial decisions in consultation with the congregation.

In the same vein, Ayegboyin observes that Church leaders have played a key role in promoting community development and social justice, particularly in rural areas. In the political arena of Nigeria, Church leaders can have a positive influence on political development and become instrumental in shaping Nigeria's political development by offering moral guidance, building a sturdy community mobilisation, advocate equity and justice, fostering and prioritising accountability and establishing conflict resolution. In addition to these duties, Church leaders undertake administrative tasks like supervising Church staff, managing budgets, and collaboration with Church leadership in decision-making processes aligning with the Church's vision and mission, formulate mission statement and policy, manage social and political problems in the Church, create investments, establish schools, and hospitals for faith community. In fact, some Church leaders in recent times play the managerial, advisory, directorate, governing and mentoring roles that contribute largely to the growth of the Church to keep the Church moving with optimal attendant success.

### **Mission Dei**

The Church is mission oriented which is not barely limited to save men, but also to restore the temporal order. It emerges from all human aspirations and activities including economic, political and socio-cultural processes wherein the Church proclaims the gospel truth. Hence, the great responsibilities of the Church to her community should be holistic through the Church leaders. It should embrace the whole person in his total physical and spiritual reality. Furthermore, The Church should take as priority the salvation of the whole community and the renewal of the whole temporal order. Wright, (2006) affirms that the mission is the overflow of God's love for his world, and the Church's participation in that mission is the expression of its worship, its obedience, and its service.

Similarly, the Church and the state are authorities divinely established to govern men's lives in this world. The call for separation within them is intended to protect government from the encroachment of a powerful state. To achieve this objective, Donard, (1980) says that, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) calls for participation of Christians in the government. According to this body, those of us Nigerians who are Christians have now realized our fallings in the past. We confess our non-challant attitude and call on all to a responsible participation in running of our country, Nigeria. Without mincing words, a state whose laws and institutions are influenced by Christian life and principles is a blessing both for true religion and civil liberation. Thus, the mission of the Church encompasses both spiritual and social dimensions.

### **Overview of Nigeria's Political Framework**

The political framework in Nigeria is the type that requires re-defining, clear-cut restructuring, reformation and transformation in all corrupted sectors. Nigeria's recent politico-societal landscape has been beleaguered by multifaceted challenges ranging from entrenched corrupted practices, victimological tendencies and unemployment woes. Scholars have observed that corruption has become entrenched inhibitions to Nigeria's socio-economic development and

political stability. The system has created lots of barriers for the masses. As good as the politics is, its good image is damaged through bad governance which is intimidating and hazardous.

Atelhe and Egwu (2014) argue that with reference to Nigeria, it is evident that corruption has been entrenched in all facets of public governance in the country. In effect, with the sphere of political governance in Nigeria, corruption has become quite pervasive and intractable. It has manifested in the fashion of kletocracy, authoritarianism patronage syndrome, clientelism, malfeasance, perfidy, nepotism and outright plundering of the national patrimony by the political leadership alongside their cronies. Nigeria, as it is descriptively appraised, has witnessed to a large extent much political violence since its inception. One of the fundamental issues in the Nigerian politics is traced to leadership problem and that is why effective and efficient leadership in the political arena of Nigeria is germane and calls for consideration. Many political leaders in Nigeria cannot handle the national issues according to God's wisdom; rather, they corrupt the politics with their selfish interest, ambitions, inconsiderate policies that bastardise the system.

Corruption is deadly and inimical cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of our political system in Nigeria. Many of our leaders are absolutely corrupt and this inherent corruption has corrupted nearly every sector in the nation building. Here we pinpoint corrupt political agenda, corrupt system, corrupt practices, and corrupt political communication through the Mass media, corrupt policies and corrupt political platform. This corruption has negated the fabric of our political system and ideology. Akangbe, (2012) asserts that, the monster has been allowed to breed some ills in the nation. The level at which it has been allowed since independence depends again on how the national leadership has handled the case.

Corruption was present with us in the first republic and in subsequent years it became more prevalent as it took many dimensions. Poverty caused by an uncontrolled corruption also leads to poverty and people who experience poverty find it arduous to meet their basic needs. Out of desperation, they easily become tools for abuse and manipulation in the hands of the privileged elites. Another fundamental factor of political instability or violence in Nigeria is the intra and later inter party bickering. The various accusations of election riggings among political parties contributed to political violence and the use of thugs in most parts of the country in the first and second republic elections. It has been vividly observed that politicians in offices would not want to leave when defeated and rejected by the electorate having tasted power, fame and spoils of office. Political crises in Nigeria have led to devastation of many lives and property in Nigeria and this menace also prevent foreign investors from coming to the country for their commercial exertions.

Corruptive practices in politics in Nigeria starts from the attitude of the electorates who have to be bribed with money and other things before voting. Nigerian system is monitised to the extent that people feel that money can buy everything. The expenses hurdles politicians have to jump over by elections constitute a serious factor aiding the propensity towards corruption. The fee charges at every stage of election processing are too exorbitant and they constitute a sort of temptation for politicians to be corrupt on winning election. It is also observed that, the policies of re-election in Nigeria can best be described as the politics of insensitivity to human suffering. Despite the widespread knowledge of penury of most people in Nigeria, some state political leaders continue to lavish money in their subterranean campaign to win influential people for support in their bid for re-election. As a result of the corrupt politics in Nigeria manifesting themselves in selfishness, greed and fraud of the politicians, the economy is seared and crippled. Oniya (2004), laments that the money that should have been used for establishment of lucrative industries for



creation of gainful employment has been stolen and siphoned to foreign banks. This dubious and ruthless act results in unbearable suffering of many people in Nigeria.

Economically, the situation of unemployment in the country is worsening and highly pathetic. It is vividly noted that thousands of graduates in universities and other tertiary institutions remain unemployed while some are underemployed. This has surfaced as a result of wrong government policies, selfish interest, wrong priority and lack of concern for the suffering graduates. Unemployment ensues in loss of earning incapability of individual level and loss of the contribution of individuals to the national economy. It is observed that the level of poverty, fraud, insecurity and violence being experienced in the Nigerian society has painted a bad picture of the Nigerian nation in the international community. Nigerian has been branded as corrupt economically and politically unstable. She is identified with fraud, crime, poverty and disease. Upon critical evaluation, politics in Nigeria should not be left in the hands of the destroyers whose mindset is to vandalise the valuable asserts and heritage of the country. The crucial need is to open up an avenue for participation of Church leaders in the Nigerian politics in order to reform the deformed system and policies.

Meanwhile, it is fundamental for the Church to influence the politics in Nigeria through the pragmatic and holistic participation of her leaders in politics. It is never a taboo for any Church leader to join a particular political party of his choice so far the purpose is for transformation and regulation of the deformed system, to serve humanity and promote better governance. Church leaders need to engage in the issues of the society. Facing the challenges of our socio and political reality, conversion and transformation of the structure become a continuous process that envision the fuller kind of life where human disunity and solidarity are respected and promoted where moral principles prevail in socio-economic life and structures where justice, love and solidarity and the inner driving forces of development.

Political leaders formulate, implement and see to it that all other uses related national development came to fruition. Political stability is highly needed so that the nation can develop socially and economically. During the struggle for independence, one of the unifying forces was that after political freedom, all other things would fall into shape. National development is a completed effort to improve the well-being of the citizens in the political, socio and economic spheres. According to Falaye, (2016), when Christians participate in the government system of their country, they would be in a position to influence good and godly heritage that will guarantee religious liberty for our children and grandchildren. Our children are going to inherit our habits, attitudes towards others, family life and examples we have set; they are going to inherit the education system, health care system, justice system, political system and religious system. Our children are going to inherit our country and its value system. The critical issue in the life of any nation is what one's generation passes on to the next.

Our challenge is to ensure we establish a government based on Christian principles and pass this on to our children and grand-children. This is their real inheritance. If we fail in such terms, then the nation will be bankrupt of Christian values that make a great nation. Church leaders should not be afraid of voicing out their minds about the government, however, in a constructive way. Without political participation, there cannot be governance and this non-participation ensues in dictatorship. Without the participation, there cannot be democratic governance. Thus, participation is the core of democracy. Church leaders are to be encouraged to participate in politics which is part of their sacerdotal duties to ensure justice, good governance and better society. Church leaders need to engage government on political and developmental issues which leads to

good governance. Without the effective participation, corruption, injustice and lawlessness will pervade the land and there cannot be societal development. A good leader should be able to take constructive criticism and take it to developmental project. There cannot be democracy without participation and there cannot be development.

### **Appraisal of Intersection of Early Missionary Work and Politics in Nigeria**

Without mincing words, early Missionaries played a fundamental role in shaping Nigeria's political landscape. Notably, their pivotal activities, which commenced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, were not limited in scope to evangelical activities but also encompassed education, social and community development, healthcare and political stability fostering development and sustainability in all sectors. For instance, Adebisi (2003), notes that there was the prevalence of tribal wars throughout the Yoruba country prior the incursion of Christianity and the nineteenth century was the climax of such hostilities, which almost ruined the life and the economy of the Yoruba race.

For instance, in Yorubaland, one of the indigenous Anglican clergy, Daniel Olubi noted for his political prowess and participation, operated on the basis of cordial relationships with the political authorities of Ibadan and he sought to influence their politics without becoming subservient to them. Olubi saw the propagation of Christianity not as the creation of a new society, but as a reform or development of the old. He followed the contemporary history and politics in Yorubaland with keen interest. Johnson (1921), submits that the ground for peace was prepared, first, through diplomacy in which the CMS missionaries and their agents played the principal role as the credible ambassadors between the warring factions. In particular, their continuous dialogue with the various factions, in the face of high turnover rate in the ranks of British officers in Lagos, provided the necessary continuity in the search for peace. This is especially so because when the *Alaafin*, who first made the desperate call for British intervention, lost confidence in their willingness to assist, the CMS agents were the ones who sustained the efforts toward peace. In this, their role in the crisis was redemptive and, in no small measure, contributed to rescuing the feuding nation from its precipitous state to later usher in a festive mood of thanksgiving throughout Yorubaland in 1892. Olubi believed that it was necessary that the Mission should be close to the political leaders if it wished to influence them and the Ibadan also cherished his guardian and advice.

Omotoye, (nd) recalls that the frantic and consistent efforts were made by the missionaries in finding an amicable solution to the war. The activities of the Christian missionaries, such as J.B. Wood, David Hinderer, Daniel Olubi, Samuel Johnson and Charles Phillips, all played active roles in the settlement of the conflict. They appealed to the warriors on both camps for the cessation of the war. The historical evaluation, Ayandele (1966), indicates that the missionaries of this time were the best medium available for pacification. Daniel Olubi in Ibadan, Samuel Johnson in Oyo and Charles Phillips in Ondo and so on – none could afford to be neutral to the political situation of their day. They were most suitable to create the connecting links between the Lagos Government and the people, giving useful advices for promoting goodwill for the welfare of all. Daniel Olubi became a respected diplomat and consultant to traditional rulers, princes and Chiefs. He became the one person they all looked up to, for advice of one form or another in sensitive state and social matters. He transformed into a trusted mentor for the Chiefs in Ibadan and the *Alaafin* of Oyo. During his own days, aside being an indigenous Priest, Olubi was seen as a public figure, a strong philanthropist, an institution par-excellence, a strong pillar of the city and an elderly statesman who perpetually performed all sorts of diplomatic functions most exclusively in the pursuit of

peace. Daniel Olubi had become a respectable institution and was regarded as the ‘strong pillar’ of the city and the spiritual father. He was respected by the women to have intervened by proffering a solution to the burning political issue. Thus, the modern day Church leaders should not shirk away from politics to contribute their quota towards the political development and sustainability of democracy in Nigeria.

### **Advocating for Church Leaders’ Engagement in Politics**

In recent times, on account of the level of corruption, injustice, social upheavals and civil unrest, insecurity and unfavourable government policies coupled with unemployment and high rate of crime, many people have begun to look up for Church Leaders as moral guide and justice promoters, embracers of equality and advocates of good governance in the Nigeria’s politics. The Nigerian government calls for a well-defined transformational agenda. The complex situation of the country is a major concern for the Church. It is vividly observed that the high rate of corruption in the country has eaten deeply into all the political fabrics and systems in Nigeria which has brought the nation to a standstill. It is also observed that many sound policies which have yielded good results in other countries of the world seem to encounter failure in Nigeria as a result of some selfish forces who have cultivated the devilish habit of cornering the resources meant for National development and sustainability into private foreign accounts.

A fundamental change of values and interests is required from all Nigerians. The neo-colonial thoughts that anything from abroad is better than the home grown is really affecting the nation. There seems to be some cabals who benefit secretly from this industry so much that they would not let Nigeria grow economically. Nigerians are fractured along tribal, religious, social class and language lines. Despite the constitutional framework which should assist to evade the marginalization of any group, nepotism has been brazenly waived as a banner in the historical existence of Nigeria. It is noted that most of the leadership positions in the executive, judiciary and legislative arms of government are being controlled by a people from a certain section of the country. All these call for a reform and participation of Church leaders in the Nigeria’s politics to promote good leadership and governance.

Bad governance is eclipsed as a major barrier confronting the development and political stability of Nigeria today. Observably, the Church that is the beacon of light is voiceless and inactive in the Nigerian’s governance and this call for a discourse in scholarship. The recent youth protests that rocked Nigeria divulged the dissatisfaction of the suffering and hopeless citizens in the governance of the country. This menace in the political arena in Nigeria has injected rottenness in people’s bones. This is attributed to miscreants dominating and holding tightly the rod of political power with inconsiderate and rigid policies ensuing in mishap. Political involvement is a vital tool for the development of every society today. Certainly, if righteous Christians are involved, the citizens will greatly enjoy good governance, dividends of democracy and high standard of living and vice versa. Administrative system of Nigeria has suffered and is exposed to failure and shipwreck as a result of unpatriotic governance headed by callous, inhumane and selfish individuals. Bad governance produces corruption, insecurity, unemployment, economic crisis, rising kidnapping and banditry. Government’s insensitivity and non-challant attitude to the untold plight of the citizens in recent times in Nigeria is a call for the Church to wake and fully participate in the politics of the country purposely to foster good governance.



## Conclusion

The paper has appraised the need for the participation of Church leaders for in the political system of Nigeria and the challenges that call for their participation knowing fully well that politic is not limited to certain individuals. On this note, the following recommendations are made:

1. Church leaders should bear it in mind that they serve as agents of transformation and this transformative roles should be extended to the political arena of Nigeria.
2. Aside from being a politician, prayers should be made earnestly for the betterment of the country that covers every sector.
3. Political reformation and transformation call for an urgent attention in Nigeria. Church leaders should move close to the politicians and constantly advise them on issues that are of importance in their political programs for peaceful co-existence and growth.
4. As the agent of change and national development, effective church communiqué should address national issues to help the politicians see areas of adjustment for political stability.
5. The situations of our land continue to call for concern. It is now more evident that to govern Nigeria is a herculean task. The high level of corruption in the land has almost brought the nation to a standstill. So many nice sounding policies which have worked in other countries seem to fail in Nigeria because some selfish forces will rather corner the resources meant for national development into private foreign account. We cannot continue in iniquities why saying we continue to pray for God to deliver us. Therefore, a fundamental change of values is required from all Nigerians starting from the Church, Church leaders and all those in position of authority.

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